

Private Sector Vocational Technical Stakeholder Group

Tumwater, WA
September 20, 2004

Minutes

Attendees

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROVIDERS

Bradley Ehrlich, Career Opportunities Group
Patti Kacz, Intracorp
April Poier, Grant & Associates
Jill Rosenthal, RES
Scott Whitmer, Whitmer & Associates
Michael Barron, IAM Crest
Cathy Cottingham, People Systems, Inc.
Terry McCall, McCall Vocational Counseling Services
Fred Cutler, Cutler Counseling LLC
Kari D'Aboy, IARP D'Aboy Career Horizons

Absent

Jenny Gaffney, Gaffney Counseling & Consulting
Craig Bock, IARP Bock Consulting Inc.

Attendees

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIES

Roy Plaeger-Brockway
Blake Maresh
Rich Wilson
Mary Kaempfe
Don Lane
Josh Morse
Donna Spencer
Rheo Aieta
Joanna Walsh

Absent

Paulette Golden
Terry H. Bailey
Dave Erickson

Audience Members

Tracey Kenela
Kendall Grant-Wark

Laura Close
Dave Buonviri
Jack Lintelmann

Introductions & Review – Blake Maresh

Blake Maresh, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the agenda. He then welcomed two new people to the meeting. This meeting was the first for Rheo Aieta, Acting Supervisor for VDRO. Rheo previously was an auditor in PSRS and a counselor and manager for many years in the private sector. Also new to the committee at this meeting was Kari D'Aboy, who will fill the last vacant seat vacated by members whose terms ended in June. Kari is a longstanding member of the vocational community and has served in leadership functions, including as Chair of the IARP Management Group. Both additions will bring a wealth of vocational rehabilitation knowledge to the committee. Blake asked that those in attendance introduce themselves.

The committee reviewed the minutes, and Blake asked if there were any questions or comments. Bradley Ehrlich said it would be helpful if members' professional affiliations were listed on the front of the minutes. He also asked if a future agenda item could be changes to the phone system in claims.

RTW Program Manager & Org Changes – Roy Plaeger-Brockway

Roy explained to the VTSG that the department had approved some changes that it hopes will strengthen its vocational services program. In order to better facilitate good policy development and to better coordinate the various vocational rehabilitation activities within L&I, the department is forming an organizational structure that will be headed by a new program manager focusing on return to work.

This program manager will oversee the Preferred Worker Program, the vocational services consultants in claims, and vocational staff in L&I field locations. Also to be moved under the RTW Program Manager are Private Sector Rehabilitation Services and the performance reporting function. The Vocational Dispute Resolution Office (VDRO) will remain separate from this structure as it provides independent reviews on vocational work that has been disputed.

Roy said the consolidation of the organizational structure will take some time but will start to occur soon after the RTW Program Manager is hired. He shared that the position announcement for the job would be open until October 29, with interviews scheduled for mid-November. While HSA would be returning to its original focus of health care management, Roy related that it has benefited from the time it has administered over vocational purchasing, and that HSA will continue to be involved in disability prevention activities.

Outcome-based Payment (OBP) Initiative – Blake Maresh

Blake gave a short presentation on the department's work on the OBP project to date. He explained that L&I executive management had given its approval to move forward with the proposed model in late July. He started by setting a context for the project, showing that outcome-based payment and pay for performance (P4P) models are being tested in the health care arena as well as in vocational rehabilitation. However, this project would be, to L&I's knowledge, the first attempt in workers' compensation vocational rehabilitation.

Some of the main features of the model are:

- Focuses on Ability to Work Assessment (AWA)
- Pays for work not on an hourly basis, but at QUALITY completion
- L&I conducts quality reviews on all work products prior to acceptance
- Reduces payment for re-work
- Emphasizes existing rules, policies as standard for work

The project would be implemented over a three-month period using volunteer vocational providers. The team is aiming for an early 2005 start date.

Several members had questions or comments:

- Bradley asked if the quality reviews would incorporate industry best practices, and he stressed his belief that it is important to do so. He also advocated that the standards, and other project information, be prominently communicated on the department's website, where it will be readily accessible.
- Kari asked about the payment matrix that was presented, inquiring whether the proposed time intervals for payment had considered actual referral durations. She also asked about whether there would be an appeal process in place for the quality reviews.
- Fred Cutler expressed concern about the ratio of the up-front payment to the final payment based on acceptance of the work.

Blake indicated that the department intended to do broad training and education on the project prior to and during implementation. This will include future briefings with the VTSG.

Work Evaluation Workgroup – Suzanne Waits & Kathy Weber

Guest speakers Kathy Weber and Susanne Waits-Harris gave a Power Point presentation to the VTSG on L & I's new guidelines for vocational testing. They are members of an internal work group that has been working on the guidelines for several months.

Private providers and department staff will use the new vocational guidelines to help provide better vocational testing to injured workers. The department formerly used the GATB as the main vocational test but it is no longer available. Providers are now expected to choose alternative tests, appropriate to the specific injured worker and situation.

Rheo Aieta, manager of VDRO and a member of the vocational testing work group, will provide another Power Point presentation at the department's December 10, 2004 Vocational Conference.

For more information, contact Keith Klinger at 360-902-6362.

Provider Communications – Don Lane & Rich Wilson

Rich and Don led a discussion aimed at assessing how well the department's current methods of communicating with the provider community are working. Rich explained that the IARP Management Group (IMG) had made an invitation to the department to use it as a means to communicate, through large firms, with a large number of providers. The department's preference, in considering the invitation, was to have a broader discussion about how to communicate with all providers most effectively.

Don and Rich used a series of questions to focus the discussion. Below is a summary of the questions raised and the conversation.

1. What communication methods do L&I use?

"What's new"?

- Should link to VTSG minutes
- E-Mail providers- New information (each VRC)
- How many VRC's know that PA/ARNP can manage claims?
- Highlight what's really new.
- List Serve
- "Front page" to Voc Link.

Provider Bulletins

- Useful as provider tools
- Sometimes delay RE: When policy was implemented.
- Consider "E-Copies"
- Not easy to access on line
- Develop a separate index for Voc PB's and PU's.

Voc Services Manual on line

- Need to notify providers of changes/updates to manual
 - Letters (Memorandums)

- Surveys
- Conferences
- Grapevine "informal" Phone calls, etc.
- VSTG?
- Performance Report

2. VTSG – How is information communicated?

Members bring information back to their firms and other groups:

- IMG (IARP Management Group)
- WA Chapter IARP
- IDEAS

Some use E-Mail to re-cap

- Not every provider is getting this information
- "IMG" employs significant numbers of VRC's/Interns
- Can we count on Managers to disseminate information?
- "Should we?"

VTSG minutes are published on web

- List serve notice would help
- Put link to minutes

3. Are there any areas of law, rule, or policy that the department has not communicated clearly?

- Undocumented workers
- Publish recent audit findings on web- make it transparent
- Info handed out/ presented at conferences – could be web based

4. What is responsibility of firm to impart information to staff?

- Yes, they have responsibility
- VRC's have responsibility too
- Direct relationship between VRC & Department. Department needs to direct communication to practitioner.
- Firm Conference calls
- VTSG – Information does not get disseminated
 - Need to follow-up in writing.

Audience Comments:

Before the close of the meeting, Blake asked if the audience members had any questions or comments. A committee member asked if we could place a link to the VTSG minutes on the "What's New" page. Another member expressed her concern that it does not always feel as if the input that the VTSG provides to the department is really heard or makes much difference.

Another comment about communication came from a different committee member. He asked how providers could improve communication with claim managers. He indicated that working with the department's claim unit VSCs helps but that CM communications are not working. He urged the parties to explore creative approaches to resolve the situation. The department's ORCA (On-line Reporting and Customer Access) Project was also mentioned in this regard.

An audience member also asked a couple of questions. He asked whether information could be published on the website regarding trends or patterns of VDRO deferrals or overturns. He suggested that it could be useful as a learning tool for vocational counselors. He also asked if there was an exodus of claim managers from the agency, and if so, what was being done to replace the staff. Department staff responded that they did not believe there was any exodus occurring, other than typical staff turnover.

Final Comments:

With no additional comments or discussion, Blake adjourned the meeting shortly after 1 p.m.